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ABSTRACT

Independent evaluations are usually requested when a parent disputes the psychological evaluation of his or her child completed by school officials. These independent evaluations are comparable to a second opinion as found in other professions. However such evaluations are often fraught with problems, including qualifications of the examiner, recommendations made, and cost. This paper describes an independent evaluator agreement made between two cooperating school agencies. Problems associated with the standard method of obtaining independent evaluations are discussed. The paper describes the development of the agreement and its track record over four years, and reports on successful court cases involving the agreement. A copy of The Cooperative Agreement for Independent Psychological Evaluations (the agreement discussed) is included. The Independent Evaluator List, a form on which to list evaluators and their specialties, is also provided. (MKA)

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ABSTRACT

INDEPENDENT EVALUATIONS: A NEW TWIST TO AN OLD PROBLEM

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Independent evaluations are usually requested when a parent disputes the psychological evaluation done by a school district. They amount to a second opinion as found in other professions. However, such evaluations are often fraught with problems, including qualifications of the examiner, recommendations made, and cost. The purpose of this paper is to describe an independent evaluator agreement made between two cooperating school agencies. Problems associated with the standard method of obtaining independent evaluations will be discussed. The presenters will then describe the development of the agreement and its track record over the last four years. Benefits of the agreement will be highlighted. Participants will receive all relevant information and materials needed to establish such an arrangement of their own.

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SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to describe an independent evaluator agreement made between two cooperating school agencies. Problems associated with the standard method of obtaining independent evaluations will be discussed. The presenters will then describe the development of the agreement and its track record over the last four years. Benefits of the agreement will be highlighted. Participants will receive all relevant information and materials needed to establish such an agreement of their own.

Independent Evaluations -- The Standard Method and Its Problems

Independent evaluations are usually requested when there is a dispute about evaluative data. Usually the complainant is a parent concerned about the evaluation done by the school district. Independent psychological evaluations roughly equate to a second opinion as found in other professions. However independent evaluations are often fraught with problems, such as:

a) Qualifications - Many private practice psychologists are only minimally qualified to provide assessment services to children. Some see very few children in their practice, and are often not trained to provide a comprehensive appraisal of a child. They rarely see kids with severe limitations or students who are a "challenge" to assess. In some cases, the licensed psychologist will have a master's (or even a bachelor's) level psychologist in their employ conduct the evaluation.

b) Cost - Many private practitioners charge exorbitant fees to do such an evaluation. It is not unusual for an evaluation to cost in excess of $1250. In addition, many private practitioners charge extra for meeting with the parent to go over results, attend IEP meetings, etc.

c) Recommendations - Many private practitioners make recommendations that are unrealistic, outlandish, or not cognizant of state department regulations for special education placement. Many times, their evaluation creates more conflict than resolution. Some recommendations are outside of the scope of the district to provide.

A Cooperative Agreement - A New Twist To This Problem

Our solution to this problem has been to develop a list of independent evaluators from one another's respective institution. In this fashion, we act as independent evaluators for each other, thus reducing most of the problems associated with requesting independent evaluations. The benefits of this process are that it:

a) assures the student of an evaluation by an appropriately trained/ certified school psychologist

b) assures that recommendations made are appropriate for the child's age, state special education guidelines, and within a school district's ability to provide

c) dramatically reduces the cost of the independent evaluation by controlling the expenses associated with the evaluation

Developing this agreement was relatively easy. First, we identified a potentially cooperative school agency. We then asked for school psychologists to volunteer to participate. Each psychologist had the option of identifying/ expecting certain populations of students. We then developed and signed a cooperative agreement and the supervising psychologists in each agency exchanged lists. When parents requested an independent evaluation, the list is shared with the parent for them to choose.

Evaluation of the Agreement

Approximately four years later, our agreement has proven to work exactly as envisioned. As of this point, we have conducted approximately 10 independent evaluations. Some unanticipated benefits have arisen in this relationship. In one case a bilingual psychologist was called on to do an evaluation for the other school agency. In another case parents disputed the psychologist's evaluation, dismissed our independent evaluators list, requesting that the school district pay for an evaluation by a psychologist of their Atlanta attorney's choosing. A hearing officer indicated that the parents could use the Atlanta psychologist's evaluation, but the school district would not be responsible for payment of the evaluation. A third case involved a due process hearing officer ruling in favor of the process as a viable means of obtaining a second opinion in an objective, responsible and cost-efficient manner.

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT FOR INDEPENDENT

PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATIONS

(School Agency A) and (School Agency B) agree to establish a cooperative agreement for the purposes of:

1) providing each other with a list of evaluators who are trained and certified school psychologists, and
2) allowing school psychologists from our respective staffs who are on this list of independent evaluators to provide independent psychological evaluations for each other upon request.

When an independent psychological evaluation is completed by a school psychologist from the agency for the other agency, this other agency will, in turn, complete a comparable psychological evaluation for the agency providing the independent evaluation. This will allow for:

1) the provision of independent evaluations through an exchange of resources rather than by expenditure of additional funds, and
2) the receipt of independent evaluations by trained school psychologists who are knowledgeable and experienced in the evaluation of school-aged children and in the application of (state) eligibility regulations.

(School Agency A)	(School Agency B)
_____	_____
Signature	Signature
_____	_____
Title	Title
_____	_____
Signature	Signature
_____	_____
Title	Title
_____	_____
Date	Date

INDEPENDENT EVALUATOR LIST

Evaluator	Specialty/Exception
Name Address City, State, Zip Work Number	Hearing Impaired
Name Address City, State, Zip Work Number	
Name Address City, State, Zip Work Number	No severe/profound
Name Address City, State, Zip Work Number	Bilingual English/Spanish
Name Address City, State, Zip Work Number	Preschool